THE DEFINITIVE STATEMENT

Determining The Relationship Between Divine Law & Human Wisdom

(kitâb fa<u>s</u>l al-maqâl wa taqrîr mâ bayna'l sharî'a wa'l <u>h</u>ikma min al-ittis<u>â</u>l)

by

Abu'l Walid Muhammad ibn Rushd

In the Name of God, the Merciful and Compassionate

May the peace and blessings of God be upon Muhammad and his descendants.

We, the senior judge and jurist and foremost scholar, Abu'l Walid Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Rushd, having given praise to God and prayed for His chosen servant and apostle, Muhammad, declare:

The purpose of this review being to consider the status of philosophy and the sciences of logic from the legal perspective, we shall examine whether their study is obligatory, recommended, neutral, reprehensible or forbidden in religious law.[1]

*

If the function of philosophy is none other than to study and reflect upon the facts of existence, as they provide evidence of the Maker – *i.e.* as they are things that have been made – then knowledge of their making can but provide evidence of the Maker and the more complete such knowledge is, the more consummate will be our knowledge of the Maker.[2] Clearly, if scripture recommends and encourages reflection upon the facts of existence then what is known as philosophy will be either obligatory or recommended in scripture.

That scripture invites rational speculation about the facts of existence and requires them to be known thereby, is evident from several verses in the Book of God (hallowed be His name). For example,

You who have eyes to see, reflect[3]

explicitly obliges the application of rational inference, or a combination of rational and juridical inference.[4] Similarly,

Have they looked at nothing in the kingdom of the heavens and the earth and of what God has created ?[5]

explicitly encourages reflection upon all the facts of existence. God has taught that Abraham (peace be upon him) was among those to whom He granted the privilege of this knowledge:

> *Thus did We show Abraham the kingdom of the heavens and the earth...*[6]

The word of God says,

> *Do they not consider how the camels were created and how the sky was raised ?*[7]
>
> *... and reflect upon the creation of the heavens and the earth.*[8]

There are countless other verses.

It is, therefore, established that reflection upon and reasoning about the facts of existence are prescribed by scripture. Reasoning is nothing more than the drawing out, or deduction, of the unknown from the known – *i.e.* inference (or, by inference). Study of the facts of existence must, therefore, proceed by means of rational inference. Obviously, the approach invited and encouraged by scripture shall be the most rigorous form of reasoning, employing the most rigorous form of deduction namely, logical demonstration.[9]

Given that it is by means of demonstration that scripture has encouraged us to know God and the entirety of His creation; given that it is preferable, even imperative, that whomever aspires to provable knowledge of God and all the facts of existence first learn the forms and conditions of proof and in what way apodeictic inferences differ from dialectical, rhetorical[10] and fallacious inferences; given the impossibility of this without a prior understanding of general inference (*i.e.* how many kinds there are and what is and is not a valid inference); and given the impossibility of this without prior understanding of the parts of the syllogism (*i.e.* the types of premise) – then the believer who obeys the scriptural ordinance to reason about the facts of existence ought[11] first to acquire a working knowledge of the tools of reasoning.

Just as the jurist infers the need to understand the forms of valid and invalid juridical inference from the scriptural ordinance to apply

juridical judgement to particular statutory rulings, so the savant must infer the need to understand the forms of valid and invalid logical inference from the scriptural ordinance to reason about the facts of existence. In fact, if the jurist infers the need for juridical inference from God's words,

You who have eyes to see, reflect,

how much more justified is the savant in inferring from the same verses the need to understand logical inference.

The objection cannot be raised that the study of logical inference is a heretical innovation, on the grounds that it did not exist in the earliest Islamic times.[12] The study of the forms of juridical inference is, likewise, a subsequent development but it is not deemed heresy; a similar position must be adopted with regard to logical inference. There is a reason for this but here is not the place to mention it. In fact, most of the Islamic establishment sanctions logical inference, except for a small group of extreme traditionalists who can be refuted with scriptural texts.[13]

Having established that scripture enjoins the study of the forms of logical inference, as it does the study of juridical inference then, clearly, if none of our immediate predecessors undertook research into this subject, it will be necessary for us to initiate such research and for the contemporary scholar to avail himself of any past scholarship in order to develop a thorough understanding. It would be difficult, if not impossible, for one man alone and on his own initiative to comprehend everything that requires to be known about logical inference – even more difficult, in fact, than it would be for one man to deduce everything that requires to be known about the forms of juridical inference.

If previous research has been undertaken, we clearly have the obligation, in furthering our purpose, to avail ourselves of what our predecessors may have said. That they were or were not our co-religionists is of no account. After all, it is enough that the instrument of ritual sacrifice satisfy the conditions of suitability, not that it should belong to one of our co-religionists.[14] By those who are not our co-religionists, we mean the Ancients who investigated these topics in pre-Islamic times. Thus, and given that the Ancients undertook comprehensive research into the foundations of rational inference, we should consult their writings to

study what they have said. If everything is correct, we shall accept it accordingly and draw attention to whatever is incorrect.

Having completed this kind of study and acquired the tools which will enable us to reason about the facts of existence and the evidence of creation they provide – for without knowledge of the creation, there is ignorance of the thing created and without knowledge of the thing created, there is ignorance of the Creator – we should then proceed to study the facts of existence in the order and with the methodology we have acquired from the craft of logical demonstration.

It is similarly clear that we will only achieve our aim in respect of the facts of existence by establishing continuity of research, whereby the contemporary scholar avails himself of his predecessors' work, as is the case, for example, in mathematics. Let us suppose that neither geometry nor astronomy existed in our time. It would be impossible for one man to ascertain, by himself, the size and shape of, and the distances between, the celestial bodies. Even the most intelligent of men would be unable, for example, to determine the size of the Sun and the planets in relation to the Earth (in the absence of divine inspiration or something like it!). In fact, told that the Sun is approximately one hundred and fifty or one hundred and sixty times larger than the Earth, he would think the proposition sheer madness, although it is a proven astronomical fact that no astronomer would deny.[15]

It is the science of the foundations of jurisprudence – the study of which took a very long time to complete – and jurisprudence itself, which most readily suggest the comparison with mathematics. Today, if one individual, by himself, wished to derive all the arguments ever produced by the scholars of the four schools in controversial matters of inter-doctrinal dispute throughout the greater part of the Muslim lands (outwith the Muslim west) he would deserve to be a laughing stock, since not only would it be beyond him but the work has already been done. It is self-evident in both the theoretical and applied sciences that there is no science which any one man is capable of elaborating by himself. How, then, could it be so with the very science of sciences: philosophy?

Accordingly, if we discover research into the facts of existence or theories by the Ancients that satisfy the conditions of proof, we should study what has been written. Whatever accords with the truth, we shall happily and gratefully accept and whatever conflicts, we shall scrupulously but generously point out.

It will be clear from the foregoing that the study of the Ancients is enjoined by scripture, since what they strove for in their writings is precisely what scripture encourages us to aspire to. To forbid the study of such writings by someone competent to study them – *i.e.* someone in whom the two qualities of natural intelligence and legal probity / moral integrity meet – is to bar the door through which scripture invites men to knowledge of God – namely, the door of rational speculation which leads to knowledge of the truth. That is the height of ignorance and limit of remoteness from God.

If someone should stumble and err in the course of studying these texts, whether through lack of intelligence, an unsystematic approach, the dominance of passion, the absence of a teacher to guide him or the combination of two or more of these factors, it does not follow that they should be withheld from the man who is competent to study them. Harm of this sort attaches to these writings by accident, not by essence, and something inherently and essentially useful should not be rejected on the grounds that it may be accidentally harmful. Thus did the Prophet (peace be upon him) tell the brother of the man whose dysentery had worsened after taking honey, as the Prophet had instructed, "The Lord has spoken truly, it's your brother's stomach that has lied !"[16]

In fact, we would say that to forbid the study of philosophical writings by those who are competent, on the grounds that some wretches were once, perhaps, misled by reading them, is like denying a thirsty man a drink of cool, clean water – and he then dies of thirst – on the grounds that some men have, in the past, choked to death on water. Choking to death on water happens accidentally but dying of thirst is something essential and inevitable. The accidents to which philosophy is exposed are the same as those to which all the sciences are exposed. For how many jurists has jurisprudence itself been a cause of scant self-restraint and obsession with worldly matters? Indeed, that is how most of them are, although their profession is one that, essentially, demands practical integrity. The profession which demands intellectual integrity is no less prone to accidents than one requiring practical integrity.

*

Having established the foregoing and given that we, as Muslims, hold the firm conviction that our divine law is truth and is what betokens and invites to the beatitude which is the knowledge of God and His creation, it is the case that this conviction is established in the mind of every Muslim in the manner his nature and disposition require for him to give assent.[17] In respect of assent, men's natures are qualitatively different – some men assent to demonstration, some assent to dialectical argument, (as they are inherently incapable of more), while others assent instead to rhetorical argument.[18]

Because it summons men in these three ways, our divine scripture embraces the universal assent of all mankind, except such as he whose tongue would wilfully reject it or whose soul, through his neglect, lacks the means of responding to it and, thereby, to God. The word of God states unequivocally that the Prophet was sent uniquely with a message to all the races of mankind, since his law embraces all paths of summons unto God:

> *Call unto the path of your Lord with wisdom and fine sermon and engage them in debate with what is far superior.*[19]

Since scripture is a truth and invites the inquiry that leads to knowledge of the truth then we, as Muslims, can be absolutely certain that no proposition[20] based upon logically demonstrated proof will entail any contradiction of scripture. The truth does not contradict the truth but, rather, confirms and testifies to it.

Now, if some knowledge about a particular fact of existence is deduced by demonstration, scripture will either say nothing about that fact or will acknowledge it. Where scripture is silent, no conflict emerges and the matter then has the same status as a legal ruling deduced, in the absence of statute, by the jurist using juridical analogy. If scripture does pronounce on it, the literal meaning of the scriptural statement will either accord or conflict with what has been demonstratively concluded. If it accords, there is nothing to be said; if there is a contradiction then scriptural interpretation is required.

Interpretation means the extraction of the figurative sense of a statement from its actual sense, without breaching accepted Arabic linguistic practice whereby a thing may be designated by its analogue, cause, effect, conjoint or other recognised feature of the categories of figurative speech. If the jurist can regularly do this in order to establish

legal statutes, the metaphysician has more justification for doing so. The jurist's inference rests only on assumption, the seeker after truth's rests upon certainty.[21]

We state categorically that where any demonstrated proof contradicts the literal meaning of scripture, the latter will admit of interpretation in accordance with the linguistic rules governing interpretation. This is a proposition that no Muslim believer will question or doubt but how much greater will be its certainty in the mind of the man who embraces and applies this concept to unite the rational and the received.[22]

In fact, we will state that no contradiction exists between the literal meaning of a scriptural statement and demonstrated proof but that, if the totality of scripture is examined, a further statement will be found with a literal meaning that either confirms the interpretation or approximates thereto.

There is thus consensus among Muslims that it is unnecessary for all scriptural utterances to be accepted in their literal sense or to be delivered from their literal sense by interpretation. Where they disagree is over which scriptural statements are to be interpreted and which are not. For example, *Ash'ari* theologians[23] interpret the verse of the Lord's enthronement and the prophetic account of the Lord's descent,[24] both of which *Hanbali* jurists accept literally.

Scripture contains literal and esoteric statements because human nature and disposition vary in respect of assent, and it contains apparently contradictory literal statements to rouse *those grounded in knowledge* to undertake a unifying interpretation. To this idea the word of God refers:

> *He it is who has revealed unto you the book containing clear verses* [.....] *and those grounded in knowledge.*[25]

Suppose the following question: Scripture contains elements that there is consensus among Muslims[26] to accept literally, elements they are generally agreed to interpret and elements over which there is dispute. Is it legitimate for demonstration to conclude that what there is consensus to understand literally should be interpreted or that what there is consensus to interpret should be understood literally ?

Our reply would be: If the existence of consensus has been established with certainty, it is not legitimate. However, it is legitimate if

the consensus contains an element of assumption. Abu Hamid,[27] Abu'l Ma'ali[28] and other leading theorists have stated that no charge of unbelief may be positively levelled for breaching consensus by interpreting scriptural statements of this type.[29]

On theoretical issues, the existence of consensus cannot be established with the certainty that it can on practical issues. This is shown by the impossibility of establishing the existence of consensus on any given issue in any given period unless we have clearly defined the period, we know the precise number and identities of contemporary scholars and we have been made aware of the doctrinal position of each towards the issue in question via a number of reliable chains of transmission.[30] Additionally, we will have been satisfied that those scholars were agreed that (1) scripture does not contain literal or esoteric elements, (2) everyone should have access to all the facts of any given issue and (3) there is a universal approach towards scriptural knowledge.

However, it is reported that many of the earliest Muslims held that scripture contains literal and esoteric elements and the layman, unable to understand the latter, had no need to know them. Bukhari,[31] for example, reports 'Ali ibn abi Talib[32] (may the Lord be content with him) as saying, "Speak to people of what they will understand unless you want God and His apostle to be accused of lying".[33] Similar statements have been reported from several of our forebears. How, then, is it conceivable for consensus on some theoretical issue to be reported to us when we know with certainty that there have been scholars in every age who believed that scripture contains elements whose truth should not become common knowledge? A different standard applies to practical matters of worship. These, it is generally held, should be disclosed equally to one and all and we are satisfied that consensus obtained if there was widespread knowledge of the issue and no reports of disagreement regarding it have reached us. However, while this may be sufficient to establish consensus on practical matters, it is not on theoretical issues.

Suppose the following question: If an interpretation that breaches consensus does not entail a charge of unbelief – since consensus is inconceivable on such matters – what do you then have to say about Muslim philosophers like Abu Nasr and Ibn Sina?[34] In his book *The Incoherence*, Abu Hamid accused them categorically of unbelief on three counts: (1) asserting the pre-eternality of the universe, (2) asserting that God has no knowledge of particulars (may He be exalted above that) and

(3) interpreting what scripture says about the physical resurrection of the body and the states of the hereafter.

Our reply would be: It would appear from what Abu Hamid said that his charge of unbelief against them is not categorical, since he stated in *The Distinction* that the charge of unbelief for breaching consensus is qualified.[35]

From what we have said, it is clearly impossible to establish consensus on issues of this kind, given the reports from many of the earliest Muslims, as well as from subsequent generations, that interpretations exist that should only be disclosed to men qualified to understand them, namely, *those grounded in knowledge.* We elect to pause after the words *those grounded in knowledge*[36] since, if scholars lacked knowledge of scriptural interpretation, they would lack the distinctive manner of assent that faith requires of them and them alone. God has described them as those who *believe therein*, which can only refer to the faith which obtains from demonstration and requires knowledge of scriptural interpretation. The faith of those who are not scholars is, therefore, not the faith that obtains from proof. If the faith by which God has characterised scholars is exclusive to them, it must be faith that obtains from proof. If it obtains from proof, it necessarily involves knowledge of scriptural interpretation, since God has indicated that such scriptural statements possess an interpretation that is the truth – and demonstration supports nothing but the truth. This being so, it is impossible for general consensus to be established over interpretations, which are the province of scholars. This will be self-evident to the impartial.

Furthermore, it may be thought that Abu Hamid was mistaken in ascribing to the Peripatetics the claim that God – hallowed be His name – has absolutely no knowledge of particulars. In fact, they hold that He does have knowledge of particulars but that His knowledge is generically different to our knowledge of them. Our knowledge of particulars is an effect caused by the thing known and is, therefore, contingent upon the existence of the thing and, thus, changes as it changes. However, God's knowledge of being is the antithesis of this, since His knowledge is the cause of what is known (*i.e.* being). To equate these two kinds of knowledge is to make the essences and attributes of antitheses the same, which is the height of ignorance.

Speaking of both originated knowledge and pre-eternal knowledge as "knowledge" is a case of simple homonymy. There are

numerous cases where one noun is applied to opposite things – for example, *jalal* may refer to something big as well as something small and *ṣârim* to both light and darkness. No single definition thus comprehends both kinds of knowledge, despite what contemporary theologians suppose. This issue has been dealt with in a separate paper that one of our friends prompted us to write.[37]

How can the Peripatetics be accused of claiming that God does not know the particulars of pre-eternal knowledge when they believe that the true vision encompasses premonitions of particular events occurring in future time and that this foreknowledge comes to a man during sleep from the sempiternal knowledge which governs and controls everything? They hold that not only does he not know particulars in the same way as us but universals, too. The universals known to us are, likewise, effects caused by the nature of the existing thing; the opposite is the case with that Knowledge. Demonstration proves that such Knowledge transcends qualification as either universal or particular. It is, therefore, pointless to dispute whether or not the philosophers should be accused of unbelief on this point.

On the question of the pre-eternality or origination of the universe, the disagreement between the *Ash'ari* theologians and the Ancients could almost, in my opinion, be reducible to a difference in terminology, particularly among some of the Ancients.

They agree that there are three categories of being: two opposite extremes and one intermediate. They agree over what to call the two extremes but disagree over the designation of the intermediate. One extreme is being, brought into being from something other than itself and by something – *i.e.* an active cause; it is of matter and its actuality is preceded by time. Such is the case of bodies whose presence is perceived by the senses, *e.g.* water, air, earth, animals and plants, etc. The Ancients and the *Ash'arîya* are unanimous in calling this category of existing things "originated phenomena". Its antithesis is Being which is neither from nor by anything else and is not preceded by time. Similarly, both groups agree to call it "pre-eternal". This Being is perceived by demonstrative proof and is God, hallowed and sublime. He is the Agent of all, who brings into being and sustains all things in being. May He and His majesty be praised! The category of being intermediate between these two extremes has neither come into being from anything nor is it preceded by time; it is, however,

brought into being by something – *i.e.* an agent. It is the universe in its entirety.

They all agree upon the existence of these three attributes of the universe. Dialectic theologians accept – indeed must accept, since they believe that time is something associated with motion and bodies – that the universe is not preceded by time. They likewise agree with the Ancients that future time and future being are infinite. It is over past time and past being that they disagree. The theologians believe that the past is finite – which is the doctrine of Plato and his school – whereas Aristotle and his followers hold that it is infinite, like the condition of being in the future. As this other state of being clearly has some resemblance to both truly originated being and pre-eternal being, those for whom the resemblance to the pre-eternal eclipses the resemblance to the originated, call it "pre-eternal" and those for whom the resemblance to the originated prevails, call it "originated". Actually, it is neither truly originated nor truly pre-eternal. The truly originated necessarily tends to decay and the truly pre-eternal is without cause. Because they believe past time to be finite, Plato and his school call it "originated sempiternally".

These doctrines of the universe are not sufficiently divergent for the charge of unbelief to be levelled against one side or the other. For that, they would have to be so far apart as to be antitheses – as the theologians think the words "pre-eternality" and "origination" as applied to the universe are antitheses.[38] Our discussion, however, has shown this not to be so.

Furthermore, the theologians' beliefs about the universe are inconsistent with the literal meaning of scripture. When examined literally, it appears from the scriptural verses which deal with the bringing into being of the universe that its form is originated and that being itself continues, with time, indefinitely in both directions. When the word of God says,

> *He it is who created the heavens and the earth in six days and His throne was upon the water*[39]

the literal meaning implies that being – the throne and the water – existed prior to this being and time existed prior to this time – *i.e.* attached to the form of this being as the number of movement of the sphere.[40] Similarly, when the word of God says,

> *On a day when the earth and the heavens will be changed into other than they are*[41]

the literal meaning requires there to be a second being subsequent to this being. When the word of God says,

> *Then He turned unto the sky and it was smoke*[42]

the literal meaning implies that the heavens were created from something. Thus, not only is the theologians' doctrine on the universe inconsistent with the literal meaning of scripture but they also engage in interpretation. Nowhere in scripture is it explicitly stated that God was in being concurrently with absolute non-being.[43] Now, how is consensus on the theologians' interpretation of these verses supposed to have been obtained when a school of philosophers holds beliefs about the existence of the universe that are consistent with the literal meaning of scripture just discussed?[44]

It would appear that the protagonists in these difficult issues will receive their reward if they are right and be excused if they are wrong. Belief in something on the basis of accepted evidence is constrained, not voluntary – we are not free to believe or disbelieve as we are to stand or sit. As freedom of choice is a precondition of legal responsibility, the man who believes a false proposition due to some accidental misconception will, if he is a scholar, be excused. Thus did the Prophet say, "If the judge, having exercised considered judgement, delivers the correct verdict, he will have double the reward than if he delivers a wrong one."[45] And is there any judge more eminent than one who would pass judgement upon how existence is or is not? The judges here are the scholars upon whom God has uniquely conferred the right of scriptural interpretation and the error that scripture pardons is the error committed by scholars – and scholars alone – when speculating upon the difficult issues whose study is the burden entrusted to them by scripture.

However, regardless of whether it concerns a theoretical or a practical issue, the error committed by someone who does not belong to this class of men is a downright sin. Just as the judge who is ignorant of prophetic precedent may not be excused for delivering a wrong verdict, so

the man who would judge of the facts of existence but who fails to satisfy the conditions of competence, may not be excused. In fact, he is either a sinner or an infidel.[46] If possession of the qualifications enabling a responsible, independent legal judgement to be made – namely, knowledge of the sources of the law and the procedures of deduction by analogy therefrom – is a prerequisite for the judge of what is and is not permissible in law, how much more is knowledge of the basic principles of reasoning and procedures of inference a prerequisite for the man who would judge of the facts of existence.

In short, there are two kinds of error in respect of scripture: the pardonable error of the scholar in his area of specialisation (as the skilful physician who makes a medical error or the experienced judge who delivers a wrong verdict are pardoned) but which is unpardonable if committed by the non-specialist, and the generally unpardonable mistake which is tantamount to unbelief if it offends against the fundamental principles of the law, and heresy if it offends against the elaboration of those principles.

Such is the error committed in respect of matters that can be known by each of the methods of argumentation and which it is possible for everyone to know. Examples of this are: the affirmation of the existence of God, prophecy and beatitude or torment in the hereafter. These three fundamental dogmas are supported by the three categories of argument – rhetoric, dialectic and demonstration – which, between them, allow all men to assent to what they are enjoined to know. Since each is a fundamental religious dogma, the man who denies them is an infidel, either obstinately resisting what lies in his heart or having neglected to take account of the evidence. If such a man understands demonstration, he had the opportunity to give assent through demonstration; if receptive to dialectic or preaching, these means of assent were, likewise, available. Thus, when the Prophet said, "I have been ordered to struggle against men until they say, 'There is no god but God' and believe in my prophecy", he meant by whichever of the three methods that lead towards faith is appropriate.[47]

Those things which, by reason of their obscurity, can only be known by demonstration have been made the object of divine mitigation to those of His slaves to whom demonstration is inaccessible, whether due to inherent inability, custom or lack of educational opportunity. For them, He has coined parables and allegories of such things and in these has He

summoned them to believe, since it is possible to assent to such representations through the arguments in which all men may participate – *i.e.* dialectic and rhetoric. Thus is scripture divided into the literal and the esoteric, the literal element being the symbolic representations produced to convey those concepts and the esoteric, those concepts themselves but manifest only to men able to understand demonstration (*cf.* the four or five existential categories mentioned by Abu Hamid in *The Distinction*).[48]

However, and as we have said, when it happens that we may know the thing itself by the three methods, there is no need for symbolic representation. The scriptural statement is then to be understood literally and does not admit of interpretation. If this sort of literal statement pertains to the fundamental dogmas, the man who interprets it is an infidel – for example, the man who believes that there is neither beatitude nor torment in the hereafter, the purpose of the scriptural statements being only for men to live in physical and sensible peace with one another, that they are devices and there is nothing for man beyond the life of the senses.

Having established the foregoing, our argument will have thus made clear to you that there are literal elements in scripture that do not permit of interpretation. If fundamental principles are involved, the interpretation of these is unbelief and if elaboration of the principles is involved, it is heresy.

However, there is a literal element that rationalists[49] are obliged to interpret – for them to accept it literally would be unbelief – but for others to interpret and deduce a non-literal meaning from would be unbelief or heresy. To this category belong the verse of the Lord's enthronement and the prophetic account of the Lord's descent. Thus, in recognition of her belief, did the Prophet order a black slave to be freed when she – being no rationalist – told him, "God is in the sky".[50] The reason here is that it is difficult for the class of people who can only assent through an act of imagination – *i.e.* who can only believe in something insofar as they can imagine it – to believe in the existence of something that has no relationship to anything imaginable. Also included here are those who can only grasp the relationship in terms of physical location but who, nevertheless, display a slightly higher level of rationality than the first class by rejecting belief in divine corporeity. Consequently, such people should be told that these elements of scripture are obscure and a pause made at the end of

But the interpretation is known to none but the Lord.[51]

Rationalists agree that this category of scriptural statement should be interpreted but disagree over the interpretation, commensurate with the level of expertise in demonstration of each.

There is a third category of scriptural statement that fluctuates between these two and over which there is some doubt.[52] One group of scholars includes it among the literal statements which do not admit of interpretation, while others include it among the esoteric statements which it is inadmissible for scholars to accept literally. The statements in this category are ambiguous and difficult and it is excusable – for the scholar – to err.

Now, suppose the following question: Given three levels of scripture, into which, in your opinion, do the statements on the attributes and states of the hereafter fall?[53]

Our reply would be: They clearly fall into the disputed category. We find some men who regard themselves as rationalists claiming that these statements must be accepted literally, since there is no conclusive proof that the literal meaning is impossible. This is the approach of the *Ash'ari* theologians. Others with a similar commitment to demonstration interpret them but the interpretations frequently differ. This group includes Abu Hamid and many Sufis, some of whom, like Abu Hamid in certain of his writings, support two different interpretations.

It appears likely that the scholar who errs in these matters will be excused (and the one who is correct, receive recognition and reward), as long as the existence of the hereafter is acknowledged, the interpretation is restricted to the attributes of the hereafter and it does not address or lead to denial of the existence of the hereafter. Denying the existence of the hereafter is unbelief, since it is one of the fundamental dogmas of the law to which assent is given by the three methods embracing all races of mankind. However, those who are not scholars must accept these scriptural statements literally. For them, the act of interpretation would be unbelief because it leads towards unbelief.

We therefore hold that, for the man who has the religious duty to believe in literal meaning, interpretation is an act of unbelief because it leads to unbelief. Divulgence of interpretation to such a man by a scriptural exegete is a summons to unbelief and whoever summons to unbelief is himself an unbeliever.

Interpretations must therefore be confined to writings on demonstration where they will be accessible only to specialists. To confide them to other works and apply the methods of poetry, rhetoric and dialectic to them, as Abu Hamid does, is to transgress against both scripture and philosophy. He may have meant well and hoped to increase thereby the number of scholars but the effect has been to increase by no less a margin the number of libertines. As a result, some men have sought to malign philosophy, some to malign the law and others to reconcile the two. It would appear this is one of the aims of his writings and the fact that he did not adhere to any one doctrinal position on paper suggests he was trying to arouse intellectual curiosity. Indeed, with *Ash'aris* he is an *Ash'ari*, with Sufis he is a Sufi and with philosophers he is a philosopher. This line could have been written just for him:

> If one day I meet a Yemeni, from Yemen I come from
> And if I meet a Ma'adi, it's to 'Adnan I belong.[54]

The leaders of the Muslim community should limit access to those of his writings with a scientific content to scientists.[55] They should likewise forbid laymen access to works dealing with demonstration, although these are less harmful since they can usually be understood only by people of superior intelligence – *i.e.*, the type undone by lack of practical integrity, unsystematic study or want of a teacher.

However, to impose a general prohibition would frustrate the summons of scripture and be a great wrong against both the superior class of men and the superior class of existing things. It does justice to these latter that they be fathomed by those equipped to know them profoundly – the superior class of men. The greater the existing thing is, the greater it is wronged by ignorance. Thus does the word of God say,

> *To set up a god beside God is a terrible wrong.*[56]

This, then, is what we believed had to be established regarding such inquiry – *i.e.* the dialogue between religious law and philosophy, and the rules governing interpretation of scripture. Were the public not already familiar with them and the issues we have discussed, we should not have judged it permissible to commit a single word to writing and we would not be obliged to ask the pardon of qualified scriptural exegetes for so doing.

The nature of these matters is such that it is in writings of demonstration that they should be discussed. May the Lord give success and guide unto the truth.

*

You should be aware that the design of scripture is to instruct in true knowledge and right conduct.[57] True knowledge is the knowledge of God and all the facts of existence as they are – in particular, those that are most sublime[58] – and the knowledge of beatitude and torment in the hereafter. Right conduct consists in performing actions that will earn beatitude and avoiding those that will earn torment. Knowledge of these actions is called "practical religious science".

These actions are divided into two categories. The first consists of external, physical acts, the science of which is known as jurisprudence. The second consists of mental acts, such as patience, gratitude and other acts of a moral nature that are prescribed or proscribed in scripture. The science of these is known as asceticism or "the science of the hereafter", and is the approach taken by Abu Hamid in his writing. It was because people had forsaken this type of knowledge – although it accords piety and is the cause of beatitude – and become so preoccupied with the former, that he entitled his book, *The Revival of the Religious Sciences*.[59] However, we have digressed from our theme, so let us return.

Accordingly, we assert: given the design of scripture is to instruct in true knowledge and right conduct; given that instruction has two aspects: the formation of concepts and the formation of assent, as the scholastics[60] have shown; given that there exist three methods of assent formation: demonstration, dialectic and rhetoric; given that there are two methods of conceptualisation: either of the thing itself or its symbolic representation[61]; given that it is not in the nature of all men to accept demonstration (or even dialectal arguments, let alone demonstration), as well as the difficulty of learning demonstrative arguments and the length of time required even by those who are capable; and given that the design of scripture is to instruct all men – then scripture will necessarily embrace each and every kind of method of assent formation and concept formation.

Given that the methods of assent formation include those common to the majority – *i.e.* rhetoric and dialectic, with rhetoric being more general than dialectic – and that which is exclusive to the minority – *i.e.*

demonstrative proof; and given that the primary objective of scripture is to attend to the majority, without neglecting to counsel the elite – then the greater part of scriptural teachings will be those elements common to the concept formation and assent formation of the majority.

Scripture contains four categories of such methods. The first consists of those statements which, although shared in common, are quite specific in respect of both instructional aspects – *i.e.* despite being rhetorical or dialectical, they are arguments where the conceptualisation and the assent both contain certitude. These are arguments[62] whose premisses, either widely accepted or supposed, are certain by accident and whose conclusions, by accident, are to be understood as they are, not symbolically. This category of scriptural statement has no interpretation and denial or interpretation is unbelief.

The second category is where the premisses, either widely accepted or supposed, are certain and the conclusions are symbolic representations of what they are designed to conclude. Only the conclusions admit of interpretation.

The third category is the reverse of this, *i.e.* where the conclusions are the very things it is designed to conclude and the premisses are either widely accepted or supposed but without the accident of certitude. The premisses may be interpreted but the conclusions may not.

The fourth category is where the premisses are either widely accepted or supposed but without the accident of certainty and the conclusions are symbolic representations of what they are designed to conclude. It is the duty of the elite to interpret these and the duty of the masses not to proceed beyond the literal meaning.[63]

In short, no scriptural statement admitting of interpretation can be truly grasped without demonstration. It is the duty of the elite to undertake such interpretation and the duty of the masses to accept the literal meaning in respect of both aspects – *i.e.* the conceptualisation and the assent – since they are inherently incapable of more.

Given that some types of collective assent-forming methods are more effective than others, scriptural analysts may happen to interpret in such a way that the probative force of the interpretation is more convincing than the literal meaning of the scriptural statement.[64] Popular interpretations are examples of this and may possibly constitute a duty for those whose rational faculties have attained the level of dialectic. This category includes certain interpretations by the *Ash'aris* and the

Mu'tazila,[65] those of the latter usually being more rigorously argued. However, it is the duty of the masses, unable to grasp more than rhetorical arguments, not to proceed beyond the literal meaning. It is wholly inadmissible for them to know these interpretations.

In respect of scripture, people therefore constitute three classes:

(1) a class disqualified from any interpretation; this is the overwhelming mass of mankind, who assent to rhetoric alone ; yet no man of sound mind may forgo this kind of assent;

(2) a class qualified for dialectical interpretation; they assent, by nature alone or by nature and custom, to dialectic; and

(3) a class qualified for unequivocal interpretation; they assent to demonstration by both nature and praxis – *i.e.* the practice of philosophy. Their interpretations should not be divulged to those who assent to dialectic, let alone to the masses.

The disclosure to the unqualified layman of interpretations, particularly interpretations based on demonstrative proof because of their remoteness from common lore, will lead both the man to whom they are divulged and the man who divulges them into unbelief. This is because the interpretation involves two things: invalidation of the literal meaning and assertion of the interpreted meaning. If the former is invalidated in the mind of the man of literal understanding without establishing credence in the interpreted meaning, he will, if the issue concerns a fundamental dogma, be led into unbelief. Interpretations should, therefore, not be disclosed to the masses or expressed in rhetorical or dialectical writings – *i.e.* writings that contain these two types of argument – as Abu Hamid has done.[66]

The literal meaning of the kind of scriptural statement whose duty to be accepted as such presents evident difficulty for the public but whose interpretation is, nonetheless, impossible for them to know, should be explained as obscure and known only to God. It will, therefore, be necessary to pause at the end of

But the interpretation is known to none but the Lord.

A similar response is indicated to questions about recondite issues that there is no way for the masses to understand, for example,

> *They will ask you about the spirit. Say: the spirit proceeds from the command of my Lord – how little is the knowledge you have been given.*[67]

Whoever discloses these interpretations to the layman is an infidel, since disclosure is tantamount to incitement to unbelief and contrary to the summons of the Lawmaker, particularly when the interpretations undermine basic dogmas of the law. This is just what has happened in the case of some of our contemporaries. We have seen bands of would-be philosophers believing, on the strength of their extraordinary wisdom, to have perceived things – in verses that are not interpretable – that contradict every aspect of scripture and that they have an obligation to reveal these to the masses. Their disclosure of these pernicious beliefs has been a cause of the ruin of the masses and of their own perdition in this life and the next.

They act towards the Lawmaker's design like a man who seeks to undermine a skilful doctor. The doctor aspires to preserve the health of everyone and cure disease by giving counsel, to which all can assent, on the need to take certain measures to preserve health and cure illness and to avoid the contrary. It is impossible for him to make everyone a doctor because the doctor learns how to preserve health and cure disease by demonstrably provable methods. This man then embarks on a campaign where he tells folk the doctor's methods are incorrect and sets about discrediting them, to the point where he has folk believing that they really are invalid. Or he tells them the doctor's prescriptions should be interpreted but the interpretations are incomprehensible and fail to produce anyone's practical assent.

Do you think that people in this situation will do anything constructive to preserve their health and cure illness, or that the man who declared invalid what they used to believe can institute any practical measures to preserve their health? Of course not. He will be able to do nothing for them and they will do nothing for themselves. Thus will perdition envelope them all and would do even had he delivered valid interpretations of these things, since no-one would understand them. But his insidious interpretations will lead folk to believe there is no such thing as health that needs protecting or illness that needs to be cured, let alone believe that some things can preserve health and cure illness. Anyone who divulges scriptural interpretation to the masses and to men incapable of

understanding is in a similar position with respect to the law. He corrupts scripture and turns men from it and he who alienates others from scripture is an infidel.

The above comparison carries certitude and is not merely poetic, as might be supposed. There is a valid correspondence between the doctor's relation to physical health and the Lawmaker's to spiritual health. The doctor seeks to preserve the physical health of the healthy and restore the physical health of the unhealthy, while the Lawmaker seeks the same for spiritual health.

Spiritual health is called piety. In several passages, the Glorious Book explicitly states that piety be sought by lawful actions. Thus,

> *The fast has been ordained for you, as it was for those before you, that perhaps you will show piety*[68]

and

> *Their flesh or blood will not touch God, it is your piety that will touch Him*[69]

and

> *Prayer restrains a man from wickedness and shame.*[70]

Other verses in the Glorious Book express a similar idea. It is this health which the Lawmaker demands through knowledge of the law and lawful conduct. It is this health from which beatitude in the hereafter proceeds and, by opposing it, from which torment therein comes.

It will thus be clear to you that popular literature should not contain valid interpretations of scripture, let alone pernicious ones. Valid interpretation is the charge of which God has spoken and with which man is entrusted, that all other beings recoiled from and refused to bear:

> *To the heavens, the earth and the mountains we offered the charge....*[71] etc.

As a consequence of interpretations and the assumption that, as scriptural matters, they ought to be divulged to one and all, factions

emerged within Islam and mutual accusations of unbelief and heresy were levelled, particularly by the corrupt factions. The *Mu'tazila* interpreted numerous verses and prophetic traditions and divulged their interpretations to the masses. The *Ash'aris* did likewise, although interpreted less. As a result, they plunged folk into enmity, hatred and wars, tore scripture to shreds and fragmented society.

Furthermore, the methods they adopted to advance their interpretations were inappropriate for both the masses and the elite. To the former, they were more obscure than the methods common to the majority while the latter found, upon examination, that they failed to satisfy the conditions of proof – as anyone familiar with the conditions of proof who subjects them to even a cursory examination will discover. In fact, many of the principles which underlie *Ash'ari* doctrines are sophistic. They reject many essentials, such as the permanence of accidents, the influence of things upon on one another, the existence of necessary causes of effects, essential forms and instrumental causes.

In this respect, their scholars displayed such an excess of injustice towards Muslims that one *Ash'ari* faction labelled as an infidel anyone who did accept the existence of the Creator in accordance with the procedures laid down in their writings. In truth, it is they who are the infidels and they who are lost. From here on, they were divided. One group claimed the primary obligation is to think while another claimed it is to believe. They failed to recognise, you see, which are the paths common to, and through whose doors scripture invites, all men. They thought that there is only one way. Thus did they misconstrue the Lawmaker's design and so err and mislead.

Now, let us suppose the question: If the methods which the *Ash'aris* and other scholars have adopted are not the general methods by which the Lawmaker seeks to instruct the masses – whose instruction is otherwise impossible – then what, in our divine law, are these methods?

Our reply would be: They are the methods supported exclusively by the Glorious Book. If one examines the Glorious Book, it will be found to contain the three methods which are available to all men, *i.e.* the inclusive methods for the instruction of the majority, and the exclusive method. Upon reflection, it will be clear that no better general methods for the instruction of the masses will be found than those revealed therein. To distort these with an interpretation that is neither self-evident nor clearer to all than the original scriptural utterance – which is something that will

never be[72] – is a frustration of scripture's wisdom and its express purpose namely, the promotion of human happiness. This is quite apparent if we compare the earliest Muslims with subsequent generations. The first generation attained consummate virtue and piety by means of the uninterpreted application of these statements; any who did undertake interpretation never thought to divulge it. However, when subsequent generations employed interpretation, their piety diminished, disagreements multiplied, the love they had was lost and they divided into factions.

Anyone who aspires to eliminate such heresy from the law should turn to the Glorious Book to gather the evidence for all that we are enjoined to believe. He should apply his rational judgement to the literal meaning, as far as possible without any interpretation, unless the interpretation is self-evident and held to be manifestly so by everyone. When reflected upon, scriptural statements designed to instruct mankind would appear so effective that any whose meaning is not the literal sense could only be deduced so by demonstration. This is a unique quality found in no other teaching.

The legislative teachings revealed to all in the Glorious Book possess three exclusive properties which point to its miraculous inimitability. Firstly, no arguments more perfectly convincing and productive of assent are to be found anywhere else. Secondly, they are so inherently effective that their interpretation – if they are interpretable – can be understood only by adepts in demonstration. Thirdly, they hold the indication to the true interpretation for men of truth. None of these are found in either *Ash'ari* or *Mu'tazila* teachings, whose interpretation lacks conviction, contains no pointer to the truth and is, quite simply, not the truth. It is thus that heresy has multiplied.

*

Would that we might have had the leisure to treat more fully of this design. If God grants us respite, we shall write further on it, to the extent of our ability. Perhaps it will be a point of departure for the next generation. The degrading factionalism and corrupt beliefs which have permeated the law have distressed and saddened my soul to the limit, particularly in view of the part taken in this by those who align themselves with philosophy. The wrong done by a friend is worse than that done by an enemy. What I mean is that philosophy is the wife of the law and its

foster-sister and the wrong done by a partner is the most hurtful of wrongs, quite apart from the animosity, resentment and conflict it engenders between them. They are two natural partners, two essential and instinctive friends. Likewise, have many ignorant friends aligned with the law and constituting the factions within it caused damage. By His mercy and grace, may God show them all the way that leads to love of Him, unite their hearts in piety and deliver them from hatred and resentment.

Through the instrument of the triumphal power,[73] the Lord has eliminated much of this evil, ignorance and deviation and opened the way to a great many blessings, particularly for the class of men who follow the path of reason and seek knowledge of the truth. The masses have been summoned to knowledge of God by a middle way, above the nether land of the tradition-bound conformists yet below the raucous discord of the dialectic theologians. And the elite has been shown the need for a thorough, rational examination of the source of the law.[74] May the grace of God guide unto success.

NOTES

[1]Averroes uses the words *sharî'a* and *shar'* interchangeably to refer either to the law in general or to its principal scriptural source, the Quran. He uses both *falsafa* and *ḥikma* ("wisdom") for philosophy.

[2]This sort of teleological proof of God's existence was a fundamental element in the ideology of Ibn Tumart, founder of the Almohad dynasty. By employing it here, Averroes is attempting to place philosophy at the heart of that ideology. On the relationship between Averroes' philosophy and Almohad ideology, and the extent to which he acts as apologist for that ideology, see Urvoy (*op. cit.*), pp. 69-89.

[3]Quran LIX, 2.

[4]Arabic *qiyâs*, has a number of meanings. I have usually preferred to translate it as "inference", although Averroes often seems to be using the word in the sense of Aristotelian "syllogism"; Hourani (trans., *op. cit.*) translates most occurrences as "reasoning". To a Muslim jurist it means the deduction by analogy from Quran or *sunna* of legal statutes not explicitly covered in scripture. As jurists make similar appeal to the same Quranic verses to sanction the use of juridic analogy, the jurist is unable to deny the philosopher the right to apply logical inference without contradiction. Throughout the first part of *The Definitive Statement*, Averroes compares the legal reasoning employed in the "practical" science of jurisprudence, suggesting it is little more than personal opinion, with the rigorous methods employed by the "theoretical" science of philosophy.

[5]Quran VII, 185.

[6]Quran VI, 75.

[7]Quran LXXXVIII, 17 - 18.

[8]Quran III, 191; verses 190-191 are:

> *In the creation of the heavens and the earth and the succession of day and night, there are signs for men of understanding – for those who, standing, sitting and lying, heed the Lord and reflect upon the creation of the heavens and the earth: Lord, You have not created this in vain.*

[9]Arabic *burhân* (plural: *barâhîn*) can be translated as "demonstration", "proof" or "apodeictic proof". Averroes invites his readers to accept (a) that philosophy is the rational study of the divine order and (b) that the verses of scripture he quotes recommend the rational study of the divine order, therefore, (c) that scripture recommends the study of philosophy.

His whole argument rests upon this hypothesis. He then proceeds to invite us to accept that scripture not only recommends the study of philosophy but actually obliges it. If philosophy is obligatory in law, it is a violation of the law to suppress it.

[10]See note 18, below, for the definition of these three forms of inference.

[11]Arabic *qad yajibu... 'an* translates as "it may be necessary to" or, as here, "ought to". The particle *qad* weakens the sense of obligation contained in the following verb and its use seems to be required by Averroes' awareness that his argument is less than demonstrative and his limitation, which will become apparent later, of philosophical activity only to those he believes competent to undertake it. Despite clearly stating that scripture legally obliges the study of philosophy, when he states the case for studying its four component elements (logic, the logical and philosophical writings of the Ancients and natural history), Averroes does so cautiously and in a way that suggests these things are rather less than obligatory in law.

[12]Arabic *bid'a* – "unwarranted innovation" – is a technical term in Islamic jurisprudence for ideas or practices unknown to the traditional sources of the faith. It implies individual dissent, leading to heresy (as translated here), although stopping short of unbelief; it is, consequently, the opposite of *sunna*.

[13]This "small group of extreme traditionalists" (*hashwîya*) is possibly a reference to the *Hanbali* legal school – named after Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Hanbal (*circa* 780-855) who, it is claimed, never ate water-melon because he had no knowledge of prophetic precedent on the subject. The school rejects the application of rational argument to the absolute truths of scripture, holding that adequate authority for legal rulings is to be found in the Quran and *hadîth*.

[14]"ritual sacrifice" is a reference to the sacrifice of a sheep on the 10th day of the month of *Dhu'l-hijja*, in the Muslim calendar. Averroes' argument seems to imply that, behind the distrust of rational methods within some sections of the religious establishment, there lies an antipathy to influences from non-Islamic sources.

[15]The Sun's diameter is just over one hundred and nine times the Earth's.

[16]Wensinck, *Concordance et Indices de la Tradition Musulmane*, Vol. 4 (Leiden, E. J. Brill: 1962), p. 213; "The Lord has spoken truly" is a reference to Quran XVI, 68-69 which speak of the remedial effects of honey.

[17]In this rather clumsy argument, Averroes' conclusion presupposes the premise stated in the next sentence.

[18]In his *Short Commentaries* on Aristotle's *Topics* and *Rhetoric*, Averroes elaborates: "...the extent of assent they [*i.e.* dialectical and rhetorical argu-

ments] provide is supposition which approximates certainty. In general, supposition is believing that something exists in a particular kind of way, while it is possible for it to be different than what it is believed to be. Therefore, its peculiar characteristic is that it may be eliminated through opposition; demonstration differs in that it has the peculiar characteristic of not being eliminated through opposition. There are two divisions of supposition. With one, namely dialectical supposition, opposition to it is not noticed; if it is noticed, the supposition can only exist with difficulty. With the other, which is rhetorical, opposition to it is noticed ... The dialectical argument is a syllogism from widespread, generally accepted premisses. Now, assent about the widespread, generally accepted premise results from the testimony of all or most people, not from the matter being like that in itself – contrary to the way it is in demonstration. Indeed, with demonstration, we arrive at assent which is certain through our assenting to premisses because to our minds they appear just as they are externally, not because they are someone else's opinion" (Butterworth, *Averroes' Three Short Commentaries*, p. 47). The rhetorical argument "is a syllogism leading to a conclusion which corresponds to unexamined opinion previously existing among all or most people...which strikes a man as a probable supposition and which he trusts as soon as it occurs to him, even before he has examined it" (*ibid.*, pp. 63-64). Averroes applies Aristotle's three types of reasoning to three kinds of human mind, to develop a rudimentary psychological theory.

[19]Quran XVI, 125; Averroes invites us to accept scriptural testimony for the three methods of assent, which he has derived from Aristotle and upon which he will develop the central theme of his argument. A jurist might object that "wisdom" (*ḥikma*) in this verse is synonymous with the Prophet's *sunna*, rather than demonstration. By his own terms, Averroes' argument here seems rhetorical.

[20]Arabic *naẓar*, translated here as "proposition", can mean "study", "inquiry" or "theory".

[21]Averroes' point is that juridical inference – *i.e.* analogy – is an inference from a resemblance between certain things or events to a further resemblance. Operating on the basis of similarity or probabilty and, therefore, an element of assumption, it is not capable of yielding certainly true knowledge. Philosophy, however, fulfils the Aristotelian condition that demonstration be based upon, or ultimately derived from, true and primary premisses; it thus yields knowledge that is certainly true.

[22]An incidental feature of *The Definitive Statement* is that it refutes the notorious principle of "double truth" – *credo fidem esse veram sed intelligo quod non est vera* – associated with "Averroism" by some Latin

scholastics and reproduced by others up to recent times. Nowhere in *The Definitive Statement* does the possibility exist of the philosopher simultaneously holding two contradictory beliefs – one on the basis of faith, the other on the basis of reason. Averroes categorically asserts the identity of the revealed truth of scripture with the demonstrated truth of philosophical enquiry.

[23]The *Ash'ari* school of scholastic theology was named after Abu'l Hassan 'Ali Ash'ari (*circa* 873 - 935). Interested in philosophy principally as it concerned theological issues, the *Ash'arîya* applied an "attenuated form of rationalism" (Coulson, *op. cit.*, p. 89) to theological debate and, after the demise of the *Mu'tazila* (see note 70, below), became the dominant theological school within Sunni Islam. They held that human responsibility for action and divine predestination are both equally indisputable scriptural facts. The anthropomorphism with which God is apparently attributed in certain Quranic verses must, they held, be accepted literally, "without asking why"; see *The Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, *s.v.* "Kalâm" (D. B. Macdonald).

[24]The Quranic verse referred to is XX, 5: *The Merciful One who is seated upon the throne*; the prophetic account (*ḥadîth*) of the Lord's descent is "Each night the Lord descends unto the lower sky" – Wensinck (*op. cit.*), Vol. 4, p. 414.

[25]Quran III, 7; see note 37, below.

[26]Consensus on a given issue among the jurists – the wider community is specifically excluded – in a given generation (*ijmâ'*) is deemed to be infallible, on the basis of the prophetic utterance: "My community will never agree upon an error." Averroes seeks to show that there can be no orthodoxy in respect of theoretical issues because, unlike practical matters of worship, it is practically impossible to establish consensus.

[27]Abu Hamid Ghazzali (see note 15 to *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*).

[28]Abu'l Ma'ali Juwayni (1028-1085), a native of the region of Nishapur, was a renowned scholar and author on jurisprudence and theology, in which he adhered to *Ash'ari* doctrines. He taught in Baghdad, Mecca and Madina and included Ghazzali among his pupils.

[29]There is much talk of unbelief in *The Definitive Statement* but, given that Averroes' argument is of a theoretical and polemical nature, his accusations of unbelief may be similarly treated. However, philosophy was at the mercy of political considerations and subject to legal penalty at times – witness Averroes' own persecution towards the end of his life.

[30]A report (*ḥadîth*) passed down through a number of independent, unbroken chains of transmission, where each link in each chain is known

to be a person of legal probity and integrity, affords the strongest proof possible of authenticity and is described as *mutawâtir* by the scholars.

[31]Abu 'Abdullah Muhammad Bukhari (*circa* 810-870) compiled one of the most important collections of the reported *sunna* of the Prophet and his circle.

[32]'Ali ibn abi Talib (died 660) was the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law and himself the fourth caliph; as such, he is a major figure in the early history of Islam.

[33]Wensinck (*op. cit.*), Vol. 1 (1936), p. 434.

[34]Abu Nasr Farabi and Abu 'Ali Ibn Sina' (Avicenna): see notes 13 and 1, respectively, to *Hayy ibn Yaqzan.* It will be noticed that Averroes chooses to defend Aristotle, rather than Farabi and Avicenna, against Ghazzali's charges.

[35]In *fayṣal al-tafriqa bayn al-islâm wa'l zandaqa* ["The Distinction between Islam and Atheism"], ed. S. Dunya (Cairo: 1961), p. 200, Ghazzali says: "... someone who unknowingly breaches consensus is ignorant and at fault but has not denied [scripture] and therefore may not be charged with unbelief. This is not easy to determine categorically."

[36]The Quranic verse in question is III, 7. It begins as follows:

> *He it is who has revealed unto you the book containing clear verses which are its essence and others that are obscure. Those in whose hearts delinquency lies pursue what is obscure, seeking discord and seeking to interpret it.*

Depending upon punctuation (which the original lacks), there are then two possibilities. Here, Averroes elects to place a full stop after *those grounded in knowledge*, thus the verse continues:

> *But the interpretation is known to none but the Lord and those grounded in knowledge. They say: We believe therein, it is all from our Lord. Only men of understanding truly heed.*

Having ascertained that this verse distinguishes between ambiguous and unambiguous pronouncements, Averroes employs it to sanction interpretation – by *those grounded in knowledge* – of the former. The second possibility, which he will exploit later, gives:

> *But the interpretation is known to none but the Lord. And those grounded in knowledge say: We believe therein, it is all from our Lord. Only men of understanding truly heed.*

Averroes was not the first to exploit this ambiguity, which is attested in the earliest exegeses.

[37]A short piece, sometimes known as *Damîma* ("Appendix"), where Averroes states that the basic flaw in the theologians' argument is a false analogy:

> This error has arisen quite simply by making pre-eternal knowledge analogous to originated knowledge – i.e. by making what is imperceptible analogous to what is perceptible. The unsoundness of this analogy is well-known.
>
> – Hourani (ed., *op. cit.*), p. 43.

See Hourani, (trans., *op. cit.*), pp. 72-75 for a full translation. The friend to whom the piece is dedicated is most likely the Sultan, Abu Ya'qoub Yousuf.

[38]Although these two terms are opposites, Averroes claims that their actual usage is not such as to make the arguments surrounding them wholly contradictory.

[39]Quran XI, 7.

[40]Averroes is relying upon Aristotle's definition of time, in *Physics*, as:

> a number of change in respect of before and after. Time is not change... but it is that feature of change that makes number applicable to it [IV, 11, $219^{a}30$-$219^{b}2$]... The reason, then, why people think of time as the change of the heavenly sphere is because all other changes are measured by this change and time too is measured by this change [IV, 14, $223^{b}21$].
>
> – trans. R. Waterfield (Oxford, Oxford University Press: 1996).

One revolution of the sphere of the fixed stars – *i.e.* one sidereal day – provides the basic unit of time by which other times can be assigned numbers as fractions or multiples of one day.

[41]Quran XIV, 48.

[42]Quran XLI, 11.

[43]If there is no scriptural basis for the creation of the universe *ex nihilo*, there is, therefore, no scriptural basis for the *Ash'ari* proposition that time is finite in the past.

[44]The philosophers whose views are in accord with the literal meaning of scripture, unlike the theologians, are the Peripatetics. By aligning himself with them, Averroes denies the theologians the possibility of appealing to consensus and thus concludes that their beliefs have no valid basis.

[45]Wensinck (*op. cit.*), Vol. I, p. 20.

[46]Non-philosophers are thus to be excluded from discussion of "these difficult matters" – i.e. metaphysical discussion and related scriptural interpretation. It could be pointed out no clear distinction between philosophers and legal scholars existed – both Ibn Tufayl and Averroes, for example, were senior members of the Islamic legal establishment.

[47]Wensinck (*op. cit.*), Vol. 1, p. 99.

[48]In *The Distinction between Islam and Atheism* (*op. cit.*) Ghazzali expresses concern that Muslims should be so ready to level charges of unbelief against one another and singles out the *Ash'arîya*, *Mu'tazila* and *Hanbali* factions for particular criticism. He sets out to define the difference between belief and unbelief. He identifies five levels at which assent to scriptural propositions may be given: essential, sensible, imaginary, intellectual and allegorical. Anyone who accepts scriptural propositions as true on one of these levels cannot be accused of denying the Prophet and, therefore, of unbelief (*ibid.*, pp. 175-176). An unbeliever is someone who denies the truth of scripture on any of these levels and claims that the Quran and *Hadîth* are meaningless (*ibid.*, p. 184). While some interpretations of scripture are merely rash assumptions that lack conclusive proof, hasty accusations of unbelief should not be made. Each case should be considered separately and, if the interpretation concerns nothing that pertains to the fundamental dogmas, Ghazzali would make no charge of unbelief (*ibid.*, p. 190). However, the accusation of unbelief is justified if an interpretation, in the absence of any conclusive proof, changes the literal meaning of a scriptural pronouncement – he gives the example of denial of the physical resurrection, since there is no proof of the impossibility that the soul will return to the body. Affirming the existence of the hereafter, intellectually, but denying the literal accounts of physical bliss or torment therein, or affirming God's existence but denying his knowledge of particular events, is unbelief (*zandaqa*) but qualified by some form of belief in the truth of prophecy. Ghazzali is uncertain how to pronounce on this but thinks that such a man will be excluded from paradise (*ibid.*, p. 193).

[49]Arabic *ahl al-burhân*, translated here as "rationalists" is, literally, "the men of demonstration".

[50]Wensinck (*op. cit.*), Vol. 1, p. 117.

[51]Quran III, 7; thus, when dealing publicly with ambiguous verses of scripture, Averroes elects for the second of the two possibilities indicated above, to suggest to the congregation that their meanings are beyond all human understanding.

[52]Having conceded the possibility that demonstration may not produce conclusive proof, Averroes proceeds to cover his position by claiming that the absence of agreement among specialists on the interpretation of certain scriptural verses is a function of the "shifting" nature of the verses themselves. It would appear that, if consensus on theoretical matters is practically impossible and experts armed with the tools of logical demonstration cannot agree upon interpretation, Averroes is sanctioning the validity of personal interpretation – by philosophers.

[53]Having completed his preparatory discussion of scriptural interpretation, Averroes proceeds to address, and blunt the force of rather than refute, Ghazzali's third accusation.

[54]A line by the poet 'Imran ibn Hittan (died 703). In *The Balance of Action*, Ghazzali is candid about how little importance he attached to doctrinal consistency.

[55]Arabic *ahl al-'ilm*: a broad term, referring to experts in the religious and secular sciences of the day.

[56]Quran XXXI, 13.

[57] Averroes now introduces the second theme of the book – a discussion of the purpose of divine law and the role of philosophy in fulfilling that purpose.

[58]*i.e.* the separate, or transcendent, intelligences (see *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*).

[59]The *sharî'a* is concerned with the performance of prescribed acts and the non-performance of proscribed acts, not with intention. Ghazzali disagreed with the emphasis it places on the external aspect of faith. His writings display a distaste for both the philosophers' reduction of faith to a series of logical propositions and the factional polemic of the dialectic theologians. For Ghazzali, the standard of interpretation is not demonstration but personal, mystic experience, granted by the grace of God.

[60]Hourani (trans., *op. cit.*, p. 109, note 155) translates *ahl al-'ilm bi'l-kalâm* ("the practitioners of the science of *kalâm*") as "logicians", taking *kalâm* in the sense of Greek *logos* (*i.e.* discourse), rather than "dialectic theology", as here.

[61]By "conceptualisation" (*taṣawwur*), Averroes means the creation of the mental image of the form (*ṣûra*) of a thing or of something analogous to its form, to give an understanding of the essence of the thing or of something analogous to its essence. It is then possible for an individual to make a judgement and give assent.

[62]Arabic *maqâyîs* is translated by Hourani as "syllogisms".

[63]Averroes' technical discussion is here conducted at a level of abstraction that a few examples might have helped to clarify. The extent of my understanding (for which I am indebted to Hourani's explanation) of his argument is as follows. Because it is directed primarily at the majority of men, the greater part of scripture (the Quran) consists of dialectical and rhetorical arguments – *i.e.* arguments whose premisses are either widely accepted as true or are assumed to be true. The discussion here is restricted to these arguments. These arguments have premisses and conclusions that either present a concept directly or represent it allegorically. A statement – whether premise or conclusion – intended to be taken literally possesses certainty for the majority by accident only, because its truth is not known to them by demonstration. Its truth could, however, be known to philosophers by demonstration – an example might, perhaps, be a statement like "There is no god but God". However, a statement intended to be taken allegorically does not possess the accident of certainty because its literal meaning, in which the masses believe, is not the actual and intended meaning. The literal meaning of such scriptural statements must be interpreted. This allows, theoretically, for the four combinations given by Averroes and produces his threefold categorisation of scriptural verses: non-interpretable, interpretable generally by scholars and interpretable only by philosophers. He does not say how he proposes to distinguish between a statement intended to be taken literally and one intended to be taken allegorically.

[64]It is difficult to understand how this type of interpretation fits into Averroes' scheme since, given that the degree of certainty obtained from dialectic is inferior to that obtained from demonstration, he has already cast doubt upon the activity of theologians. A. de Libera & M. Geoffroy, *Averroès, Le livre de discours décisif* (Paris, GF-Flammarion: 1996), p. 210, note 126, suggest it is simply a *de facto* acknowledgement of the kind of interpretation practised within the setting of dialectic theology.

[65]The *Mu'tazila* is the collective name for systematic theologians who, from around the latter half of the eighth century in Basra, introduced elements of Greek metaphysics into Islamic discussion in an effort to provide some rational defence of religious belief. Muslim scholasticism was created by the *Mu'tazila*. Holding that the Quran is the only source of

religious law, they criticised the reliance on the reported sayings (*hadîth*) of the Prophet and his immediate circle as a source for the derivation of religious law, that was later to become such a feature of Islamic thinking. *Mu'tazila* theologians developed a large number of interpreted doctrines, stressing the unity and justice of God and individual human responsibility for action. They observed, not unreasonably, that if all human action is predestined – as the *Ash'ariya* held (while simultaneously insisting upon an element of free-will) – the Quran cannot have been revealed for the purpose of instructing mankind. In Baghdad, they achieved an influence that reached its peak in the period 833-848, when the *Mu'tazila* became the official school of theology. The Abbasid Caliph, Ma'moun, inaugurated a notorious inquisition where persons of rank were required to profess adherence to the doctrine of the created nature of the Quran, as propounded by the *Mu'tazila* – who rejected the possibility of a material, yet uncreated, manifestation of the eternal word of God. This doctrine of the *Mu'tazila* may have been prompted by a number of motives but leads to one, inescapable conclusion. If the Quran was created, the possibility has to be admitted that, in common with other created things, it may be imperfect. The question of the created nature of the Book may have raised little interest outside narrow intellectual circles but the reaction against the persecution of conservative scholars precipitated the anti-rationalist bias that was to gain hold of orthodox Islamic thought. See also *Encyclopaedia of Islam*(2), Vol. VII (1993), *s.v.* "Mu'tazila" (D. Gimaret).

For Ghazzali, as an *Ash'ari*, God's inscrutable wisdom cannot be penetrated by Mu'tazila reasoning:

> Let us imagine a child and a grown-up in Heaven who both died in the True Faith, but the grown-up has a higher place than the child. And the child will ask God, "Why did You give that man a higher place?" And God will answer, "He has done many good works." Then the child will say, "Why did You let me die so soon that I was prevented from doing good?" God will answer, "I knew that you would grow up a sinner, therefore it was better that you should die a child." Then a cry goes up from the damned in the depths of Hell, "Why, O Lord, did You not let us die before we became sinners?"

– from *The Revival of the Religious Sciences*, in van den Bergh (*op. cit.*), Introduction, p. x.

[66]Ghazzali, however, was not unaware of a supposed need for economy of teaching and the withholding of certain theological arguments from the public, for reasons similar to those of Averroes.
[67]Quran XVII, 85.
[68]Quran II, 183.
[69]Quran XXII, 37.
[70]Quran XXIX, 45.
[71]Quran XXXIII, 72; the complete verse is:

> *To the heavens, the earth and the mountains we offered the charge but they shrank from it and refused to bear it. And man assumed it but he has been a tyrant and a fool.*

[72]It is impossible for an interpretation to be clearer than scripture because the means of scriptural expression are perfectly suited to the achievement of its design and are, therefore, the most effective means possible of expression. Its inimitability is one of the traditional proofs for the miraculous nature of the Quran.
[73]"the triumphal power" is a reference to the Almohad dynasty.
[74]Hourani (trans., *op.cit.*, p. 71) translates this as: " ...and by drawing the attention of the elite to their obligation to make a thorough study of the principles of religion." Libera & Geoffroy (*op. cit.*, p. 171), offer: "...and to the elite, it has indicated the need to engage radically with the rational examination of the Source of the Revelation."